

Not long since he was severely poisoned immediately after having gathered and handled a large quantity of *Cypripedium spectabile* and in view of the above facts very naturally attributes his trouble to this plant.

The above is largely circumstantial evidence, it is true, but any one who has examined Dr. James C. White's *Dermatitis Venenata* cannot but suspect that there are not a few plants, harmless in the case of the great majority of those who handle them, which nevertheless may be harmful to certain persons of peculiar temperaments and susceptibilities.—HENRY G. JESUP, *Hanover, N. H.*

The pine grosbeak's attack on the ashes and spruces of Cambridge, Mass., in January, 1893.—For several days preceding January 15th, Cambridge received a visit from an unprecedented number of pine grosbeaks from the north. Flocks of hundreds filled the trees and grounds here and there throughout the city. Mr. William Brewster, the ornithologist, says that it is not at all strange to see a few of these birds during the winter, and that about every third year, they are apt to visit this region in considerable numbers, owing probably to a scarcity of food in their native home.

What they fed on chiefly, during their last visit, was the seeds of the ash and the buds of the spruces. They would attack a large ash tree, laden with fruit, and in a few hours strip off every key. Their method was to take the key in the beak, deftly split open the outer covering of the base of the fruit, and extract the seed. This Mr. Brewster saw them doing by hundreds, as he stood close by under the trees. The birds were so tame, in fact, that one could stand close up to them, within reaching distance, but they would hop away quickly, if an attempt was made to catch them. I was unfortunate myself, in not seeing the birds shelling the ash keys, but I did see the snow under the trees literally covered by the fallen fruit, and my herbarium contains a pocket full of the remnants left by the birds. As a rule, the key was entire, with the exception of the slit in the ovary, the slit running quite through both sides. Generally the wing was untouched, but sometimes it was split clean through. This divided the key into two parts, but I think the action was not at all intentional on the part of the bird, his object naturally being merely to get the seed.

The birds almost completely stripped the spruces of their buds, and I am much interested to know what effect this treatment will have on the growth of the trees. The Norway spruce is our common species, and though, as in the case of the ashes, I did not see the birds at work, I saw and made a careful examination of the havoc which they committed. Here again I have Mr. Brewster's testimony to the wonderful sight afforded by these voracious birds. The spruces were laden with

snow which had recently fallen, and, as the birds plied, on every branch, their unwearied task, a thin veil of snow was continually shaken to the ground, and through it the bright colored beams of the newly risen sun cast a rosy light. The buds, terminal and axillary, of the Norway spruce, are small, and the birds left on the tree the scales of the lower half, extracting the rest to the very base of the bud. The reason for this would appear to be, that there is a natural point of division, half way between the base and the end of the bud, the scales on the lower half being, apparently, tougher and more firmly attached to the stem. The natural instinct and experience of the bird would teach him to attack the bud at the weakest point. From the base of the bud thus extracted, the bird would quickly pick out the small nucleus of tender tissue, the germ of the next year's growth of stem or inflorescence. This growing point I found to be just the size of the head of an ordinary pin, so that it is no wonder that the poor hungry grosbeak was not to be satisfied in a short time.

The bird, having picked out this nucleus, would throw the remnant to the ground, and the snowy carpet beneath the trees was thickly covered with bud scales, which were lying either separately or in the shape of the little bud as it was picked from the tree. A small hole under the bud showed where the vegetative cone had once been. I carefully examined portions of one large spruce, and I was unable to find a single bud intact. I have heard that a judicious pruning of the buds of a tree by the feathered tribe gives new vigor to the tree, but what will be the effect of this wholesale slaughter? I shall watch the trees with interest this spring, when the buds should begin to unfold.

The grosbeaks were here but a few days. As soon as they had exhausted the food supply, they departed for new fields. It is to be hoped that they have already satisfied their boundless appetites, and given the remaining spruces, at least, a chance to awake in the spring from their winter's nap.—WALTER DEANE, *Cambridge, Mass.*, Jan. 22, 1893.

EDITORIAL.

ATTENTION should be called to the work of the standing committee of the American Association on Biological Nomenclature. This Committee is the American representative of a proposed International Committee, having been appointed in response to a request from the Australasian Association. The movement promises to be as extensive as the original intention, and the American Committee, composed of